



## Chapter 1 - Setting the Scene

1813 is a date known to every English freemason but perversely it is also an event about which little detail is known. The basic fact is that on St John's Day in Winter of 1813 the two Grand Lodges of England, the Antients and the Moderns, joined together to become the United Grand Lodge of England. Even after a quarter-century of having been a freemason I had, until recently, not been able to shed much light upon the Union. I consulted the works of Robert Freke Gould, Bernard E Jones, Fred Pick and Norman Knight and John Hamill to find out more but they were all remarkably uncommunicative.

In trying to unpick events some two hundred years later it became clear that this was more than just an English story and that the brethren of the British Isles, be they English, Irish or Scots had all played a role. The main objective of seeking union was of course that of the joining together of two English masonic craft Grand Lodges, who managed the first three degrees. However the position in English freemasonry of the Royal Arch degree was an issue then, as it remains even today, and in the late eighteenth century so was the role played in events by the various

Knights Templar bodies. Today one can look at the structure of freemasonry and perceive it as all being well ordered and stratified; back in the eighteenth century the only Grand bodies were the craft Grand Lodges and efforts to bring order to the ‘chaos’ were under way. The journey was not straightforward and took many decades to resolve itself into something we would recognise today.

The (Premier) Grand Lodge of England went under several names. Typically they would simply refer to themselves as ‘the Grand Lodge’ but are sometimes described as the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster. By the time Anderson wrote his first Constitutions he titled them as ‘The Right Worshipful Fraternity of Accepted Free Masons’, and by his next edition in 1738 as ‘The Antient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons’. Whatever the rights and wrongs I shall stick to calling the Grand Lodge formed in 1717 the ‘Moderns’ and the Grand Lodge of 1751 as the ‘Antients’. The canny Laurence Dermott has much to answer for, but it does demonstrate the enduring power of the brand name to influence decisions.

Gould perhaps nails his emotional colours to the mast because in Chapter XIX the chapter entitled ‘History of the Grand Lodge of England According to the Old Institutions’ he offers us the reminder that it is really a ‘History of the Schismatics or ‘Antients’’. At the end of this chapter he says ‘It is abundantly clear, however, that during the pendency of the Schism no other degrees were recognised by the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland, than the simple *three*, authorised by the earliest of Grand Bodies’<sup>12</sup>. As to why there might be a Union is something Gould tiptoes around by writing ‘until 1809, when it became apparent to all candid minds that the breach would soon be repaired’, but alas we get no reasons for the inevitability of a Union.

Fred Pick and Norman Knight similarly only offer the thought that ‘After nearly half a century of severance a new generation of freemasons of both societies had arisen, many of whom were heartily sick of the

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<sup>12</sup> RF Gould (1836-1915), *History of Freemasonry*, Volume II, Chapters XIX and XX deal with the two Grand Lodges in this period. Robert Freke Gould published his three volume history between 1882 and 1887. Later editions are in larger number of volumes per set.

internecine warfare between the two bodies'<sup>13</sup>. More recently Hamill in his 1994 *History of English Freemasonry* makes the interesting comment that '...problems were beginning to arise in dealing with the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland and the Grand Lodges appearing in Europe and the newly created United States of America, none of which appeared willing to recognise both Grand Lodges in England'.<sup>14</sup> As we shall see later the Antients mostly had it their own way in the relationships with Ireland and Scotland and for reasons which may be simply explained.

William James Hughan, like Gould, an avid masonic researcher and founder member of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No.2076, does record the events of the Union in print in his *Memorials*<sup>15</sup> but since then these events have remained in the shadows pretty much unseen by researchers. When Hughan wrote his *Memorials* in 1874 and Gould completed Volume II of his *History* in 1886 it was still in the early days of more systematic masonic research and it was the 'authentic' school of masonic history and the 'ancient charges' that were the more popular topics than more relatively recent events.

This effort to shed some light upon the eventual union of Moderns and Antients really starts around 1751 when a dozen or so independent lodges came together to form the Antients Grand Lodge.

Hughan had a view, which was that 'The precise origin of the secession of 1730-1752 has not yet been exactly ascertained, but we may safely assume that the disagreement which arose was mainly fostered by the operatives, in whose practical minds the institution of the Society of Free and Accepted Masons on a cosmopolitan basis was evidently regarded as directly opposed to their ancient customs and privileges.'<sup>16</sup> Sadly he gives no clue as to his evidence for this statement.

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<sup>13</sup> FL Pick and GN Knight (with later editions by Frederick Smyth), *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*, p105 in the 1992 edition. This book ran to nine editions between 1953 and 1991, which must be a mark of its excellence. Sadly still nothing has replaced this excellent work for offering a broad sweep of masonic history across the British Isles and round the world.

<sup>14</sup> J Hamill, *History of English Freemasonry* (1994), p59

<sup>15</sup> William James Hughan (1841-1911), *Memorials of the Masonic Union of 1813*, (1874) and revised edition 1913. PDF versions of these are available online.

<sup>16</sup> WJ Hughan, *Memorials*, p4

It is common when writing the history of freemasonry to deal with the masonic histories of England, Ireland or Scotland as being totally separate and distinct but the reality is that they are not separate and neither can they be separated from the national histories of the ‘tribes’ of the British Islands which came together and then parted time after time. They offer the context for the events that follow and a few notes on the histories of the nations of the British Isles seem essential background to further exploration. They were as tightly entangled then as they still are today!

There had of course been a Union of the Crowns since 1603 when the Stuart King James became the monarch of both England and Scotland, while both countries retained their parliaments. Then as now there were tensions, over trade and over finance. There was an attempted Act of Settlement emanating from England in 1701 which haggling delayed until 1707 while the Scots sought better terms. Scotland had suffered grievous financial losses in the Darien Scheme<sup>17</sup> of the 1690s and also felt that it was seriously behind England in terms of growth and prosperity. While a union with England found little favour with a majority of Scots, its politicians saw their economic future being closely linked with that of England and that such a link would also protect Scottish Protestantism. Thus from 1707 England and Scotland (while continuing to be known officially as Great Britain) began to be referred to informally as the United Kingdom of England and Scotland.

It was to be almost another century before Ireland became a political part of what would become the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It was the unrest in Ireland which, in 1798, broke out into the open rebellion of the United Irishmen that resulted in the decision of the British Government to incorporate Ireland into Great Britain. This was an attempt at both union and catholic emancipation and opinion in Ireland was much divided. Some supported Union but against Catholic Emancipation while others were in favour of both. Eventually a deal was

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<sup>17</sup> The plan was to establish a colony on the Isthmus of Panama to turn Scotland into a major trading nation. It was abandoned in 1700 after a decade of effort. The attempt however consumed about a quarter of Scotland’s monetary resources. This combined with a series of bad harvests eventually led to the Act of Union with England of 1707. Scotland thus gained access to the markets of the ‘English empire’ and prospered as a result.

struck and the Irish Parliament voted for the change, and its own abolition, and the Union became effective in January 1801.

Wherever I turned in trying to work out just what influences were at work in English freemasonry I kept tripping over noble Grand Masters with either strong Scots or Irish roots. Of the Grand Masters of noble ancestry in the original Grand Lodge between 1717 and 1751 two of the seventeen were Irish and five were Scots, and in the period between 1751 and 1813 out of a total of nine Grand Masters three were Irish Peers. For the Antients, of the five noble Grand Masters two were Irish and three were Scots. Thus out of a total of thirty one Grand Masters fifty percent were not English nobility with almost a quarter being Scots, and a quarter Irish. This is a somewhat surprising tally and as the tale progresses a number of these will appear as characters who played important parts in key events in the development of English freemasonry.

One has to be surprised that so many Grand Masters of the English Grand Lodges were not English. Did the English nobility find masonry less pleasing than those of Ireland or Scotland or were there just fewer of them? Was freemasonry in Ireland and Scotland more socially significant and predominant than in England which meant that more nobility were available to be chosen? Those are questions to be answered elsewhere but the thought that there was significant Irish and Scots influence might prompt us to take a more ‘British Isles’ view of events rather than a purely parochial English view of Masonic history. This closeness, if not always unanimity of view and style, between the Grand Lodges is still mirrored today in the use of the term ‘The Three Home Grand Lodges’. But the context for all of this was partly set by great events in Europe.

The final decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were troubled times in Europe. Louis XVI came to the throne of France in the middle of a financial crisis, near bankruptcy and with expenditure exceeding income. France had spent vast sums of money during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and in support of the Americans in their Revolutionary War (1775-1783). It was attempts to raise more taxes that eventually sparked off trouble. The French Revolution ran from 1789-1799 with the Bastille being stormed in July 1789, a republic proclaimed in 1792, and King Louis XVI executed the next year. The whole revolution became radicalised and

during the Reign of Terror between 16,000 and 40,000 people were killed and Napoleon came to power in 1799.

Britain dealt with the revolt of the United Irishmen in 1798 and had been at war with France from 1793 till 1802, and again at war with France in 1803, a war that lasted till 1815. There was the famous naval battle of Trafalgar won by Nelson in 1805, Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812 and the final showdown at Waterloo in 1815. Just for good measure Britain was also at war with the United States from 1812-1815 (during which, in 1814, the British burnt the building which when repainted became the White House). The French Revolution had greatly affected the social and political scene in England. The likelihood that Britain would have a French-style revolution in Britain remains a matter of controversy to this day. However in May 1800 there was an attempted assassination of King George III in the Drury Lane Theatre by firing a gun at the King while the National Anthem was being sung. It failed and it was later discovered that the would-be assassin James Hadfield was not motivated by politics but was deemed deranged and having got in with a religious sect – he was acquitted. Grand Lodge was moved to quickly send an address to His Majesty expressing their great pleasure at his deliverance from danger.

There were however a number of intellectuals who espoused a radical cause and sought social change. It is worth naming some of them for they are names still well known today. William Wordsworth (1770-1850), poet, visited France in 1791, author of 'I wondered lonely as a cloud' commonly known as 'The Daffodils'; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet and author of the 'Ancient Mariner'; Percy Bysshe Shelley, poet and radical; Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man* and who somehow or other managed to be either in America or France for their revolutions; and Joseph Priestley<sup>18</sup>, scientist and Unitarian. These were all men who could

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Priestley, born into a dissenting family, taught languages and rhetoric at the Warrington Academy from 1761-1767 and studied electricity, elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1766. He moved around taking employment as a minister of dissenting chapels. In Calne in Wiltshire he became a founder of Unitarianism in 1774, announced the discovery of oxygen in 1776 and moved to Birmingham where he stayed from 1780-1791. He became a member of the Lunar Society which contained many of the movers and shakers of the industrial revolution, men such as Matthew Boulton (industrialist),

gain the ear of the populace and influence opinion and the government were of course much concerned. Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Irish, MP, statesman, orator, philosopher and freemason; while being opposed to revolution was also able to raise the level of debate on matters concerning British society.

Reform was to come later in the nineteenth century but the industrial revolution was radically changing the wealth and power base of the country. The need for some national response to the pressures within society was becoming ever more pressing, both from internal socio-economic developments and radical changes in Europe. All the events which led up to the Union of 1813 have to be viewed in the social background of the times. While men may be masons in tyled lodge rooms once they come out they have to feed their families and educate their children just like everyone else. The great events of the day and their fears and worries all influenced attitudes – of freemasons as much as non-freemasons.

Any mason whose interests have gone beyond the three Craft degrees will almost certainly know that the way in which the Chapter degrees are organised in England is unique in the Masonic world. It is based upon a concept of ‘Pure Ancient Freemasonry’ which declares that the degree of the Holy Royal Arch is not really a degree but rather the completion of the third degree. This curiosity will be explored in more detail in the book and with reference to events elsewhere which led to this stance being adopted in England. It is normal to consider that just as the Craft and its structures seem to have existed from time immemorial that the organisation of the other degrees has been likewise of long standing. This, both for the Royal Arch and Knights Templar, has been emphatically not the case; one might best describe the custom and practice at the end of the eighteenth century as being akin to a masonic ‘Wild West’.

The Scottish Rite does not feature here because it was a late arrival and played no real part in the events that led up to the English Masonic Union of 1813. Neither does the Mark degree, not because something

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James Watt (steam engines and a freemason), Josiah Wedgwood (of the eponymous pottery) and Benjamin Franklin (American patriot, scientist and freemason).

called the Mark was absent from freemasonry, just simply because it did not play a role in the controversies that led to the Union of 1813.

While this book is primarily a celebration of the Bicentenary of the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813 it is also perhaps a celebration of the interactions of the various masonic bodies across the British Isles and most especially of all those masons, who over many decades, have contributed to our history.